

American Romanticism

1800 - 1860

Introduction

- The theme of journey as a declaration of independence
- Bryant, Homes, Whittier, Longfellow, and Lowell are Romantic poets
- Irving is the Father of American Literature
- Cooper is the Father of the American novel
- Poe is the inventor of the American Short Story

Introduction

- Emerson is the Father of American Transcendentalism
- Thoreau is a famous practical transcendentalist
- Melville and Hawthorne are Anti-Romantics
- Dickinson and Whitman are bridge poets between American Romanticism and the 20th century

Introduction

- The rationalistic view of urban life was replaced by the Romantic view
- Rationalists saw cities as a place to find success and self-realization
- Romantics saw the city as a place of moral corruption, poverty, and death

Introduction

- The Romantic journey is to the countryside
- The Romantics associated the country with independence, moral clarity, and purity
- The Gothic Romantic, E.A. Poe, saw the country as a place of phantasm
- Irving saw the country as idyllic and as an escape

The Romantic Sensibility

- Romanticism: valuing feeling and intuition over reason
- Romanticism: viewing life as we would like it to be, rather than how it really is
- Romanticism began in Germany and influenced literature, music, and art
- Romanticism is a reaction against Rationalism

The Romantic Sensibility

- The development of slums and poverty due to the Industrial Revolution turned people from Rationalism
- Romantics believed that imagination, emotion, spontaneity, feelings, and nature were more important than rational thought

Characteristics of Romanticism

- values feelings over intuition
- values the power of the imagination
- seeks the beauty of unspoiled nature
- values youthful innocence
- values individual freedom
- values the lessons of the past
- finds beauty in exotic locales, the supernatural, and in the imagination
- values poetry as the highest expression of the imagination
- values myth, legend, and folk culture

Romantic Escapism

- Romantic writing looked for comforting or exotic settings from the past
- This was found in the supernatural, in nature, and/or in folk legends
- Romantics believed in contemplating, or becoming one with the natural world

The American Novel

- Most American Rationalist writers imitated the European writing style
- American Romantic novelists broke away from the European tradition and discovered uniquely American topics and settings
- American novelists explored the vast unknown lands – something the Europeans could not do

The American Novel

- James Fenimore Cooper was the first American novelist to break from European tradition
- His novels were set in the American frontier
- His central character, Natty Bumppo, was the first American literary hero

The American Novel

- Bumpo appeared in a series of Cooper novels as other characters: Hawkeye, Deerslayer, Leatherstocking, etc.
- He was virtuous, moral, distrustful of city life, one with nature, etc.
- His skills were almost superhuman
- Cooper's series of novels were called The Leatherstocking Tales

The New American Hero

- American Romantic literature created this unique person
- he was youthful
- he was innocent
- he was intuitive
- he was one with nature
- he was a loner – uneasy around women
- he was handsome
- he was brave
- he was moral and honorable

American Romantic Poetry

- Most Romantic poets worked within conventional European literary structures
- They proved that American poetry could reflect American subject matter, yet still hold to conventional poetic style
- Most American Romantic poets wrote about the past

American Romantic Poetry

- The Fireside Poets, a Boston group of Longfellow, Whittier, Holmes, and Lowell, were widely read and loved in America
- They were the TV of the American Romantic period and families gathered around the fireside to be entertained by their poetry
- Their subject matter was comfortable and instructional

Transcendentalism

- Considered a branch of American Romanticism
- Led by Ralph Waldo Emerson
- Refers to the idea that in determining the ultimate reality of God, the universe, the self, one must transcend, or go beyond, everyday human experience in the physical world

Transcendentalism

- Spontaneous feelings and intuition are superior to deliberate intellectualism and rationality
- Intensely optimistic belief that God is found directly in nature-even negative events can be explained on a spiritual level
- Sense of optimism appealed to audience at this time